



INTELLIGENCE NOTE

March 1, 1973

UGANDA: WILL AMIN SURVIVE?

Uganda's deteriorating internal situation and worsening relations with neighboring states have cast new doubt on President Idi Amin's ability to survive. His base of support, the army, is increasingly restless. According to one report, he is considering stepping down, though retaining control behind the scenes. Other reports say that he was asked to resign by members of the military and that his reaction was to order their assassination. One minister has resigned, and another may soon follow suit. Executions of alleged guerrillas and arbitrary military behavior in general have apparently weakened Amin's support among rural Ugandans, who form nine-tenths of the population.

East African Frictions. Last week's crisis over the disappearance of Kenyans working in Uganda was eased by President Kenyatta's personal intervention with Amin. Amin's relations with Tanzania remain strained. As long as former Ugandan President Obote and his followers stay in Tanzania, there is the risk that the Ugandan army may try a "preemptive strike" against the exiles. Finally, Uganda's troubles threaten the East African Community, which provides common rail, air, and other services to the three East African countries. Only concerted action by Kenyatta and Tanzanian President Nyerere may prevent its breakup.

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Amin's Personality. Amin is often portrayed as a buffoon and a "grossly over-promoted Warrant Officer." But his native shrewdness has enabled him to outmaneuver better-educated military rivals and sophisticated politicians. As a member of a minority tribe (the Kakwa, one of the largest contingents in the army) and a minority religion (Islam), Amin once was viewed as a neutral arbitrator between Uganda's two major, warring tribal groups. He has recently been accused of attempting to "Islamize" Uganda by eliminating Christians who have hitherto dominated the government.

The Future of Uganda. Ten years ago Uganda was one of Africa's most promising countries. Today it is one of the worst-governed. But alternatives to Amin are few. Obote remains unpopular. The likeliest successor would be another officer, but he would have to win the backing of an army which has been unreliable since it was rewarded for a mutiny in 1964.

Whoever is in charge will be hard put to solve the financial problems created by large defense expenditures and to cope with economic stagnation, which has been aggravated by the Asian exodus and moves against Western economic interests. Western influence in Uganda has declined as Arab influence has grown. But the phasing out of UK, Canadian, Norwegian, and now US assistance has not been counterbalanced by aid received from Libya, Egypt, and other Arab countries.

Implications for the US. The major US interest in Uganda is the safety of the approximately 570 American citizens who still reside there. This number will drop as the USAID program is ended and as missionaries are encouraged to leave. One possible scenario with implications for the

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US would be a confrontation between Christians and Muslims or between antagonistic ethnic groups. Uganda, an English-speaking country with extensive academic links with US Africanists and longstanding missionary ties, is more familiar to Americans than, say, French-speaking Burundi. A bloody internal upheaval or repression, therefore, might arouse attention and indignation in the US, as the Biafran issue did a few years ago.

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